

# Florida Center for Reading Research

## Reading Rescue

### What is Reading Rescue?

*Reading Rescue* is a reading intervention for struggling readers primarily in the 1st grade, but it may be used for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students, and English language learners in need of remediation. The program's goal is to equip struggling readers with the tools necessary to become fluent readers and writers. A *Reading Rescue* student receives individual tutoring delivered mainly by certified teachers, as well as school personnel such as administrators, paraprofessionals and instructional aides. The developer of *Reading Rescue*, Dr. Nora Hoover, underscores the importance of the following instructional delivery model: large group instruction, small group instruction, and one-on-one tutoring for students who are unlikely to succeed in a small group or for whom small group instruction has failed. If a school strives to meet the challenge of improved reading ability for its students by the adoption of the *Reading Rescue* program, it enters into a 3-year commitment that includes: ongoing professional development, summer institutes for the school-based *Reading Rescue* coordinators, and monitoring of program implementation. Additionally, *Reading Rescue* personnel assist the school in a restructuring process that permits greater numbers of students to receive tutoring with the school's existing resources. During the initial training, tutors receive a manual entitled A Handbook for Tutors. Other materials provided for tutoring include the Tutor's Notebook with all assessments, and the Tutor's kit, which contains the Writing book, the Letters and Words I Know book, small magnetic letters, and a small box of other necessary items such as a timer, pencils, glue, scissors, paper clips and a calculator. Ready Readers, a set of leveled books that increase sequentially in difficulty are purchased separately by the school.

Extensive professional development is an integral part of the *Reading Rescue* program for those who provide the tutoring, for the *Reading Rescue* coordinator or reading coach who maintains the program and becomes the building-level trainer, and for district and school administrators who provide leadership and support for the program. Year 1 of *Reading Rescue* implementation involves an initial 5-day training for school staff on the theory of literacy instruction and an overview of the *Reading Rescue* program, its phases, and its individual lessons. Prospective tutors receive training that includes: how to use and interpret assessments; how to make instructional decisions based on assessments; information on emergent literacy and the stages of reading development; and, instructional strategies and techniques that are aligned with the five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Because the *Reading Rescue* program tutors children one-on-one, a necessary facet of the professional development training is to prepare tutors to make instructional decisions that are tailored to a child's individual needs.

Training sessions for years 2 and 3 of the program build on the foundation of year 1 with more in depth knowledge of reading instruction as well as comprehension strategies, patterns of text organization, writing in response to text, matching students to books, and critiques of a videotaped lesson. Each year includes follow-up training sessions and quality assurance visits. Due to the vast amount of information in this professional development program, years 2 and 3 are intended to continue to develop



tutoring skills and build a depth of knowledge and understanding about the various needs of struggling readers.

The role of the *Reading Rescue* Coordinator is critical in the ongoing maintenance of a school's program. The coordinator must be a certified teacher without full classroom responsibilities. Activities of the coordinator include observing tutoring lessons and providing feedback to tutors, modeling lessons and strategies, facilitating study groups, and addressing the needs of students who are not making adequate progress. Students selected for tutoring in the *Reading Rescue* program receive daily, 30-minute lessons in a structured and consistent format. In order for a first grade student to reach grade level, tutoring typically requires 62-75 sessions, or half of the school year. The *Reading Rescue* instructional framework consists of 3 or 4 Phases (depending on the reader's skill level), which contain clearly delineated goals and benchmarks reflecting the program's sequence of skills. Each Phase reflects the levels of books used for tutoring and different instructional strategies employed by the tutor. Preceding the beginning lessons in Phase 1 is an Easing In period of 5-10 sessions, which permits the tutor and student to become acquainted and establish a rapport. During this time, the tutor administers assessments to determine a student's strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, the tutor encourages the student to construct words s/he knows using magnetic letters, and introduces the student to easy books, Elkonin boxes, and the Letters and Words I Know Book.

The daily Reading Rescue lesson contains five basic parts that are modified as a student moves through each Phase. Part 1 is dedicated to building the student's fluency and involves the rereading of familiar books. During Part 2, the student reads a book introduced the previous day while the tutor takes a written record to assess oral reading accuracy, word analysis and comprehension strategies. Part 3 of the lesson may include the teaching of letters, as well as activities that develop phonological awareness and phonics skills. In Part 4 of the lesson, tutor assisted sentence writing is another vehicle used to develop phonological awareness, phonics and comprehension. Finally, in Part 5, decoding, comprehension and vocabulary are developed as the tutor coaches the student in the reading of a new book.

*Reading Rescue* is an adaptation of Marie Clay's *Reading Recovery* instructional method. Although the lesson framework is essentially the same as Reading Recovery, there are several important differences. 1) Instruction in *Reading Rescue* reflects more recent research. 2) Well-trained teachers and other staff members of a school provide tutoring. 3) *Reading Rescue* emphasizes activities in phonological awareness and oral language development. 4) The three-year training is delivered on site.

Assessment is a requisite part of the *Reading Rescue* program and determines which students will qualify for instruction, identifies student strengths and weaknesses in emergent literacy skills, yields baseline information to assess progress, and provides tutors with the necessary information on the students' reading and writing skills. Before tutoring begins, classwide screening assessments are administered, and on the basis of those scores, all students are rank ordered. Students from the top half of the bottom quartile are identified for tutoring. It is assumed that students from the lowest half of the bottom quartile would benefit more from small group instruction within the classroom. The following informal assessments are administered individually to students identified for tutoring: Letter/Sound Knowledge, Print Concepts, Blending Sounds in Words, Segmenting Sounds in Words, Invented Spelling, Word Writing, Phonics. Other assessments include Sight Word Knowledge using the San Diego Word List from the Ekwall/Shanker Reading Inventory (Shanker, & Ekwall, 1999), and Oral Reading and Comprehension using the preprimer passage on the Ekwall/Shanker

Inventory (2000). In order to successfully complete the program, students must reach program goals and they must be administered assessments used at the onset of their tutoring.

### How is Reading Rescue aligned with Reading First?

*Reading Rescue* incorporates the five components of reading instruction outlined by the Report of the National Reading Panel. *Reading Rescue* offers a combination of teacher-directed lessons and an abundance of reading and writing practice that are infused into daily lessons. Phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension instruction are woven throughout the entire 30-minute lesson demonstrating their connectedness and interdependence.

A prominent feature of the *Reading Rescue* program is that instruction is observation-based, or, it is responsive to a student's individual needs. Because of this, teachers do not have a teacher's manual with predetermined content to guide each day's lesson. Rather, tutors make instructional decisions based on student assessments, the previous day's written record, a phonetic elements chart, and moment-by-moment indications of a student's needs. Instruction is considered systematic in a responsive manner.

Activities in phonemic awareness concentrate on hearing sounds in words through the use of Elkonin boxes where markers are used to represent sounds. Later, as students begin to make sound-letter associations, markers are replaced with magnetic letters. Students also learn to segment words by using their fingers to indicate individual sounds. As the tutor says a word slowly, the student blends it together.

Phonics instruction is closely associated with instruction in phonemic awareness. The Elkonin box exercises quickly lead into the alphabetic principle. When a particular word has been targeted for word study, the tutor draws boxes for each sound in the word, and then assists the student to identify the target sound and write the letter that represents that sound in the correct box. Word analysis is approached in several ways. Students might listen to the tutor say the word slowly, or, watch as the tutor says the word slowly while pointing to the letters. Alternatively, the student may point to each letter in the word as the tutor slowly pronounces the word. Individual letters and words are taught explicitly as the tutor models correct pronunciation and demonstrates spelling with magnetic letters. Regular word types that increase in difficulty are used to facilitate the instruction of sound-letter correspondences. Students learn to segment individual sounds in CV, CVC word types, blends and phonograms. As a student becomes more proficient with decoding, the tutor demonstrates decoding words by analogy, and then syllable by syllable for multisyllabic words.

Word and sentence writing instruction serves many purposes within the *Reading Rescue* program. It supports the student's understanding of individual sounds and their letter correspondences, the analysis of word parts, the spelling of words, and aids with fluency development as the student reads and rereads the words and sentences. The sentences used for this portion of the lesson are taken from conversation between the tutor and the student, usually concerning a book the student has read. Consequently, the student receives extra practice with the phonic elements s/he is presently learning or has recently learned. Another activity concerns constructing and reconstructing words and sentences, or, making and breaking words and sentences. Using magnetic letters, the tutor scrambles a word and the student reconstructs the word, concentrating on letters and sounds, order, and word patterns.

The tutor coaches the student to be flexible when decoding high frequency irregular words, pointing out that there are parts of the word that do represent their most common sounds. Similar activities occur with the sentence used for each day's lesson.

The primary means of fluency development is the rereading of books read in previous lessons. As the student reads, the tutor listens for strategies and word analysis skills the student may use or attempt to use. During Phase 3, students begin timed readings. Fluency goals in *Reading Rescue* are to develop oral reading speed and accuracy with reading of 98-100% accuracy, and sight word knowledge. It is essential for the tutor to become proficient at determining a student's reading skill at each step of the program so that the appropriate book level is used. Once students are rereading familiar books for fluency, it is important to verify that students are not memorizing the words. This is particularly critical since the books in levels 1-4 are highly predictable with repetitive text. It may be helpful to supplement these levels with other books at corresponding levels in order to provide students with the chance for extra practice with the phonic elements they are learning.

The final part of the daily lesson focuses primarily on vocabulary and comprehension development with the reading of the new book. Before reading, the tutor "talks through" every page of the book, building prior knowledge, discussing words that may be necessary to the understanding of the story, and encouraging the student to contribute to the discussion by noticing illustrations and connecting what they see to their own experiences or to other books they have read. The tutor models strategies and guides the student in their use. During reading, when students encounter unknown words, they are coached to attempt a pronunciation by relying on their letter/sound knowledge and then to use illustrations and meaning to confirm their pronunciation. Students write words they have learned to spell in the left hand column of their Letters and Words I Know book; tutors record new or difficult vocabulary words in the right hand column. All recorded words are reviewed and added to in subsequent lessons. Tutors are also prepared to use literal, inferential, and evaluative questioning with students. In Phase 3, tutors use Question Answer Relationships (QAR's), and in Phase 4, tutors use Reciprocal Teaching to scaffold student understanding. During Phase 2, tutors make a personalized strategy list for the student's continued use, which they use throughout the program.

There are important considerations for a school when deciding to use the *Reading Rescue* program. Due to the fact that the program is responsive in nature, tutors are not given predetermined content to teach for each day's lesson. Instead, tutors are reliant on the knowledge and skills they have gained from the *Reading Rescue* professional development, which strongly emphasizes the reading process. The advantage of this is that insight into this process may transfer when teaching reading to most students. However, this is no small task and requires highly knowledgeable tutors whose alertness and sensitivity to the individual differences among students enables them to capture teachable moments. In addition to this, the tutoring of students during the school day requires modifications in scheduling and a new role for staff involved in the program. Because of these factors, strong leadership is required over the long term, and staff buy-in is imperative for achieving and maintaining intended outcomes. The 3-year contract with the *Reading Rescue* training assures schools of ongoing support through Quality Assurance Visits, thus raising the possibility of successful implementation.

## Research Support for Reading Rescue

Dr. Nora L. Hoover was a professor of Language and Literacy in the University of Florida's College of Education in 1993 when a high poverty Florida school requested her assistance in developing a cost-effective intervention, modeled after Reading Recovery, that would address the needs of struggling readers. In 1996, a donor to the UF College of Education funded its implementation and evaluation in several demonstration sites. *Reading Rescue* is a tutorial program that is a synthesis of Reading Recovery, professional development, and research-based reading strategies.

One study of the *Reading Rescue* program was conducted in a large Northeastern city during the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years, with outside investigators evaluating the program's effectiveness. Six inner city elementary schools participated in the study. In all six Title I schools, approximately 92% of the population received free and reduced lunch and a majority of the students were Hispanic (87-98%). Among the students 27-41% were English language learners receiving Bilingual or English as a Second Language instruction.

Students chosen as candidates for *Reading Rescue* tutoring were in the lowest quartile, as indicated by a large group screening administered to 1<sup>st</sup> grade students in each of the six schools. Using a pretest/posttest experimental design, students from each school were then randomly selected and assigned to either a treatment group (n=58) receiving *Reading Rescue* tutoring in addition to regular classroom instruction, or to a control group (n=71) receiving only regular classroom instruction. Initial pretesting indicated no statistically significant differences ( $p > .05$ ) in reading achievement between the treatment and control groups. In order to determine the impact of the *Reading Rescue* program on students' reading performance, the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (MacGinitie, MacGinitie, Maria & Dreyer, 2000) was used as the standardized pretest and posttest assessment. Posttest data following the end of treatment in the Spring of 2002 and then follow-up testing at the end of the 2002-2003 school year indicated statistically significant differences between treatment and control groups ( $p < .05$ ) with results in favor of *Reading Rescue*.

A study to evaluate the effects of the *Reading Rescue* tutoring intervention for 1<sup>st</sup> graders at-risk for reading difficulty was recently conducted in schools from the same district within a large metropolitan city. After group administration of the *Reading Rescue* (RES) Classwide Screening assessments, lower performing students from five schools were identified and individually administered the RES pretests. Based on those scores, students were rank ordered and matched pairs were formed. It was not possible to randomly assign all of the students to either treatment or control group because four of the five schools assigned some of those students to the district mandated small group intervention Voyager Passport (2004). The remaining pairs were randomly assigned to either the RES treatment (n=64) or the control group (n=62). Students with comparable scores from three additional schools formed the basis of a second control group (C2) (n=60). There were no significant differences in age or gender of the students, 95% of the students qualified for free-and-reduced lunch, and 90% came from homes where Spanish was the first language. Due to the inability to randomly assign as originally planned, groups were reconfigured to reflect students receiving the RES intervention (n=64), the small group intervention (n = 52) (SG), or no intervention (n = 60).

Students in all schools received classroom instruction in reading and writing with the same instructional programs: Month-by-Month Phonics for First Grade, and Readers/Writers Workshop. Instruction during the RES intervention and the small group intervention focused on the following components: phonemic awareness,

phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The goal of both programs was to bring struggling readers to grade level. Students in the RES treatment group received approximately 50 individual tutoring sessions that met daily for 30 minutes. Instruction was explicit but not guided by a teacher's manual. Rather, tutors made instructional decisions that were responsive to individual student needs using the RES scope and sequence of skills and an analysis of a student's daily performance and assessment. Members of the school staff served as tutors and included reading specialists, adults certified in other areas such as guidance and math, and paraprofessionals. All tutors received formal RES training. Instruction in the Voyager Passport (2004) intervention occurred in small groups of 3-6 students and was delivered by reading specialists, teachers and paraprofessionals. Lessons were highly detailed and explicit with a specific scope and sequence and consisted of 130 lessons of 30-40 minute duration. Students were assessed every fifth lesson with the Vital Indicators of Progress Guide from the Voyager Passport (2004) program.

Before the intervention began, all students were pretested for letter-sound knowledge and high frequency word knowledge with the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (GMRT4), Level BR (MacGinitie, MacGinitie, Maria & Dreyer, 2000) and with the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), Level 6 (Hoover, Dunbar, Frisbie, Oberley, Bray, Naylor (2001) vocabulary subtest. According to an ANOVA of pretest scores, the students did not differ on the vocabulary test but they did differ on the GMRT4. The RES and C2 groups were equivalent and significantly higher than the C1 group. However, when mean scores were compared on the other literacy pretests, there were no differences. Also, during posttesting, Analysis of Covariance conducted on the fall GMRT4 as covariate found that groups did not differ on four out of five tests of letter knowledge where means were close to the ceiling, indicating that students in both groups had learned both letter names and sounds.

Posttesting results of the RES intervention compared to C1 and C2 revealed significant main effects in favor of the RES treatment group. On the GMRT-4, scores for students receiving the RES treatment were significantly higher in both word decoding and text comprehension than both of the control groups, C1 and C2. Results for the individually administered WRMT-R revealed significant effects for the RES group in word decoding and nonword decoding compared to the C1 group. Posttests revealed significant differences in favor of the RES students in the writing of lower case letters, segmenting and blending phonemes, reading sight words and pseudowords, generating plausible spellings of words, and reading and comprehending text. In sum, the above results indicate that students receiving *Reading Rescue* individual tutoring made significantly greater progress in their reading than other struggling first grade students in the same schools receiving a small group intervention or no intervention.

Another study in 7 Florida schools was conducted during the 1996-1997 and 1997-1998 school years. Five of the seven schools were high poverty schools where 61-96% of the students received free and reduced lunch. Students chosen to receive *Reading Rescue* tutoring were 1<sup>st</sup> grade students in the lowest 20-25% of their class as determined by beginning of the year class-wide assessments. Whereas results indicated significant increases in reading performance among participants, the absence of appropriate control groups renders it impossible to conclude that such gains can be attributed to *Reading Rescue*.

In conclusion, *Reading Rescue* includes teaching strategies that are supported by research and there is solid evidence, from studies that involved either random assignment to instructional conditions or from well controlled quasi-experimental

methods, for the efficacy of the *Reading Rescue* program as an intervention for struggling readers.

## Strengths & Weaknesses

### Strengths of *Reading Rescue*

- Professional development consists of strategies with a research base.
- Professional development is ongoing and provides Quality Assurance Visits.
- Students receive daily, 30-minute instruction that is consistently structured and intended to be fast paced.
- Instruction is determined by assessment.
- Instruction is explicit and incorporates the five components of reading instruction.
- In an attempt to increase metacognitive awareness, tutors encourage students to verbalize why they choose certain strategies.
- The benefits of *Reading Rescue* training for teachers may potentially transfer to their classroom so that all students will experience improved reading instruction

### Weaknesses of *Reading Rescue*:

- It may be time consuming to find information in the Tutor's Handbook due to the fact that it is written in a narrative style, and various other instructional materials, some which are supplied in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years of training, are separate from the handbook. Although this is not a weakness of the program, it may be a source of frustration for some tutors.

## Florida school districts where Reading Rescue training has been provided

Franklin	850-653-8831
Nassau	904-321-5881
Putnam	386-329-0510
Sumter	352-793-2315
Walton	850-892-1100

## For More Information

[www.literacytrust.org](http://www.literacytrust.org)

## References

- Hoover, H., Dunbar, S., Frisbie, D., Oberley, K., Bray, G., Naylor, R., et. al. (2001). *The Iowa Test of Basic Skills*. Itasca, IL: Riverside.
- MacGinitie, W., MacGinitie, R., Maria, K., & Dreyer, L. (2000). *Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Itasca, IL: Riverside.
- Shanker, J. L., & Ekwall, E. E. (1999). *Ekwall/Shanker reading inventory*, (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Voyager Expanded Learning (2004). *Voyager Passport*. Dallas, TX: Voyager Expanded Learning, Inc.
- Woodcock, R. (1987). *Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests-Revised*. Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service.



Lead Reviewer: Michelle Wahl, M.S.  
Date Posted: November, 2004  
Research Updated: July, 2006

Important Note: FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR.

For more information about FCRR go to: [www.fcrr.org](http://www.fcrr.org)